

# THE NEGLECTED AGENDA OF SOCIAL WORK MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISION: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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## Reference:

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## Available at:

<http://scholar.google.co.za/citations?user=YUORtfMAAAAJ>



# RATIONALE

- Social work's traditional and future agenda is by its very nature primarily focussed on intervention with the most vulnerable people of society.
- These interventions should however be managed and supervised within public and private organisational contexts.
- In addition, social work management and supervision occur at distinct organisational levels, which are globally being progressively transformed by neoliberal policies in order to ensure evidence-based practices.



- Contradictory viewpoints emerge when some scholars resist managerialism and others advocate increasing control over management and supervision practices in social work.
- Moreover, in many international social work texts, management and supervision are depicted as two separate practices, remote from policy implementation, narrowly country-specific and operating merely within a clinical context, and not compliant with objectives of social development.
- Such conflicting tendencies are seldom accommodated as mainstream topics in social work deliberations, resulting in the notion of management and supervision as a neglected agenda, which may contribute to the profession's potential condition of crisis.



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# RESEARCH AIM

- The state of affairs prompted research with the aim to delineate contemporary issues in social work management and supervision within a social development paradigm.



# CONCEPTUALISATION

(DSD & SACSSP, 2012)

## Within the context of this research:

- **Social work supervision**

... is an interactional and interminable process within the context of a positive, anti-discriminatory relationship, based on distinct theories, models and perspectives on supervision whereby a social work supervisor supervises a social work practitioner by performing educational, supportive and administrative functions in order to promote efficient and professional rendering of social work services.

- **Social work management**

...refers to the performance of tasks, such as planning, organising, leading and controlling in terms of functions relating to programmes, work load, human resources, etc.



# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- The South African social work fraternity was selected as a case study, because professional statutory regulated public and private social work, and management and supervision practices are operationalised within the country's circumscribed social development approach towards social welfare services.



# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY continue...

- Approach: mainly qualitative – also quantitative elements
- Design: exploratory
- Sampling: purposive
  - criteria for inclusion
    - Facebook group for registered social workers in SA
- Instrument: questionnaire
  - Posted on Facebook group's wall
  - Close ended and open-ended questions
- Participants: 1<sup>st</sup> 60 questionnaires returned
  - Analyses reached a saturation level





# QUESTIONNAIRE

- Determine:
  - Years participants were registered as a social worker
  - Participants' work position: social worker or supervisor/director etc.
  - Contentious issues in supervision
  - Contentious issues in social work management



# QUANTITATIVE ANALYSES

SOCIAL WORKERS	SUPERVISORS/MANAGERS/ETC
Participants: 31 (52%)	Participants: 29 (48%)
Range: 1-25 years registration as sw Average: 10 years Median: 8 years* Mode: 2 years #	Range: 6-40 years registration as sw Average: 24 years Median: 24 years* Mode: 20 years #
Total average years registration as sw:	17 years
*middle number in the sequence of numbers	# number occurs most in frequency distribution



# QUALITATIVE ANALYSES

- No significant discrepancies between responses of social workers and supervisors were evident
- Therefore qualitative findings are presented as an integrated whole



# QUALITATIVE ANALYSES

- Qualitative data was analysed into:
- Themes
  - ↓
  - Sub-themes → issues
  - ↓
  - Categories → challenges
  - ↓
  - Excerpts of participant narratives



# QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

- Themes: supervision + management
  - Sub-theme 1: Issues in training of supervisors
  - Sub-theme 2: Competency issues of supervisors
  - Sub-theme 3: Issues in support of social workers
  - Sub-theme 4: Issues in education of social workers
  - Sub-theme 5: Issues in administration of social workers' work
  - Sub-theme 6: Issues regarding work load
  - Sub-theme 7: Structural supervision issues
  - Sub-theme 8: Attitude issues of social workers towards supervision
  - Sub-theme 9: Leadership issues
  - Sub-theme 10: Issues of counterproductive working conditions



## Sub-theme 1: Issues in training of supervisors

- Challenges regarding supervisors':
  - formal supervision training
  - continuing education in supervision
  - training in terms of current theories and ELOs of social work graduates
- *“Supervisors are not trained as a specialist (in supervision) and rely on their own experiences of being supervised and there practice (social work) experience”*



## Sub-theme 2: Competency issues of supervisors

- Challenges re supervisors':
  - relevant social work experience
  - understanding of:
    - the local and global social work context
    - a social development approach to social work
    - differences between mentoring, coaching, consultation and supervision
  - theoretical underpinning of supervision
  - ethical supervision practices such as confidentiality
  - performance evaluation of supervisees
  - specific competencies ito:
    - communication
    - conflict resolution
    - cultural sensitivity
    - transformation management
- *“Is a competent social worker necessarily a competent supervisor or manager?”*



## Sub-theme 3: Issues in support of social workers

- Challenges re Supervisors':
  - understanding of the frame of reference of beginner social workers
  - debriefing of social workers
  - engagement with clinical aspects of supervision
  - refrainment from therapeutic interventions with social workers
- *“When we debrief once a month, it involves eating out at a restaurant – there is no awareness of debriefing...”*





## Sub-theme 4: Issues in education of social workers

- Challenges re supervisors':
  - construction of personal development plans for social workers
  - education of social workers in integration of theory into planning, interventions, evaluation etc.
  - eliciting of social workers' strengths
- *“Is there anybody out there who can help me? I’m young, inexperienced and scared!”*



## Sub-theme 5: Issues in administration of social workers' work

- Challenges re supervisors' focus on:
  - deadlines
  - control
  - statutory cases
  - making changes in reports
- *“Supervision becomes an administration session in order to deal with day-to-day operations in the office, instead of focussing on the professional development of the social worker”*



## Sub-theme 6: Issues regarding work load

- Challenges re supervisors':
  - roles as manager, supervisor of social workers and (in some cases) social worker
  - integration of supervision functions
  - workload management
  - demanding documentation
  - sustainable in-depth, structured and frequent supervision of social workers
  - availability to social workers
- *"I am so busy with management tasks and front-line work, I do not have time to supervise"*



## Sub-theme 7: Structural supervision issues

- Challenges re:
  - Supervisors who have to report to non-professional managers
  - Non-social work managers who do not understand supervision and intervention processes
  - Confusion between the role of supervisor and manager
  - Insufficient supervisor posts
  - Geographical distances between supervisors and social workers in rural areas
  - Absence of organisational supervision policies
  - Social workers who stay forever on an a supervision level, with no migration to a consultation level
  - norms and standards for supervision
- *“Can a supervisor also be a manager?”*



## Sub-theme 8: Attitude issues of social workers towards supervision

- Challenges re social workers who resist:
  - authority
  - guidance
- *“Supervision is outdated - no other profession does it...”*
- *“The word supervisor reminds of a supervisor in a supermarket and is not professional at all”*
- *“Supervision becomes a baby sitting...”*
- *“Social workers are reluctance to attend supervision for fear of being assessed as underproductive/wrong”*



## Sub-theme 9: Leadership issues

- Challenges re Supervisors'/ managers':
  - with autocratic leadership styles
  - assertiveness towards top management
  - reactivity rather than proactivity
  - decision making
  - strategic planning
  - leading of teams, especially multi-professional teams
  - promotion of the mission, vision, strategic aims and objectives of the organisation
  - creation of resources
  - lead by example
  - creation of networks
- *“They manage from closed doors...”*



## Sub-theme 10: Issues of counterproductive working conditions

- Challenges re:
  - resources
  - promotion opportunities
  - numeration
  - retention and recruitment
  - skills to generate viable financial means
- *“I study to become a social worker, yet it is expected of us to do fundraising....it is expected of us to be the master of many professions”*



# CONCLUSION

- This research highlighted that it is imperative to include issues and challenges in a future agenda for management and supervision of social workers
  - consisting of distinct knowledge, skills and competencies
  - and based on a configuration of context-specific, structural-functional, organisational and interactive theories, perspectives and models
  - in order to fortify social work and social development.

